



Seattle

Police Department

June 10th, 2021

Lisa Herbold, Chair – Public Safety and Human Services Committee

Seattle City Council

City Hall

600 Fourth Ave, 2nd Floor

Seattle, WA 98104

Re: SPD SLI 021-A-001

Dear Chairwoman Herbold and Seattle City Council Members:

Request that SPD submit to the Council a report that provides recommendations on de-militarizing the police force. The report should focus on enacting new policies that include:

1. Limiting the purchase of assault rifles, high caliber munitions and armored vehicles to use for tactical units
2. Assessing the use, style, and display of tactical body armor during demonstrations;
3. Training programs that focuses officer mindset on citizen service and protection;
4. Assesses additional uniform options for minimizing the visibility of weapons and equipment, while [sic] recognizing employee well-being and safety; and,
5. Prioritizes citizen safety and well-being over protection of property.

Limiting the Purchase of Certain Equipment

Currently, the Seattle Police Department operates two vehicles that would be considered “armored” under common parlance. These vehicles are the SWAT unit’s “BearCat” vehicles. Given the role these vehicles play in providing public safety and ensuring the safety of City employees, SPD does not see a need to limit the purchase of these vehicles.

The BearCat is a standard vehicle used by over 700 Federal, State, and Local law enforcement specialty teams to respond to active shooters, barricaded suspects, and serving high-risk warrants. Given recent events where the SWAT team used this vehicle to safely serve domestic violence warrants – including one where the vehicle took a high-caliber shot that would have almost certainly penetrated a normal vehicle – these vehicles are necessary options.

The SPD has a [policy](#) (subsection 6) restricting access to rifles to experienced and trained officers, outside of tactical units, which have their own heightened selection and training requirements. It is necessary to have these options in the field for patrol officers, as there has been a persistent and concerning uptick in the number of shots fired incidents involving high-caliber, high-capacity firearms. Additionally, many of the better practices following the devastating number of active shooter situations across the country in recent years have recommended an immediate response to save lives, instead of waiting for tactical teams to muster and go in. In this situation, access to options beyond a duty handgun, is necessary for patrol, but with the restrictions and enhanced qualifications SPD has in place.

Officer Safety

The City has a statutory and common law duty¹ to take reasonable care to protect employees from known and foreseeable harm. Whether responding to an active shooter, a barricaded subject, or a public gathering where there is foreseeable likelihood that some individuals will behave unlawfully towards police

or each other, the City has a duty to provide officers with reasonable protection (i.e., protection that meets the industry standard of care). This standard, presently, includes helmets, hard gear (riot gear), and other reasonable protective equipment.

The department acknowledges that there are real concerns about the appearance of officers in hard gear. SPD is aware of group psychology research that indicates that such appearance can escalate group behavior and redirect a group's focus towards police, rather than their initial message. (SPD's revised crowd management policy reflects tactical considerations and actions that account for this dynamic.) Seeking to balance its duty to provide officers with reasonable protection with a desire to subdue its appearance, SPD is currently reviewing several options of alternative equipment. This review should be completed shortly.

Officer Training

Beginning at the Washington State Criminal Justice Training Commission's (WSCJTC) Basic Law Enforcement Academy (BLEA) and continuing through the Seattle Police Department's POST-BLEA training, and on-going in-service training, the orientation of all of the trainings is on a guardian mindset focused on serving and protecting the people of Washington State and Seattle. The SPD has a variety of trainings focused on instilling awareness and empathy for the lived experiences of many parts of our community. Some of these include trainings around those with Alzheimer's or dementia, broad cultural competency, interacting with transgender individuals, and those with traumatic brain injury and our veterans. SPD also provides training on professional interaction with all, through the Listen & Explain with Equity & Dignity (LEED) training. In recent years, SPD has implemented a series of anti-racism and bias-free policing trainings, including implicit bias training, bias-free policing training, "changing perception – a fair and impartial policing approach," disrupting institutional bias, hate and bias crime training, lessons from the Holocaust, as well as anti-racist and bias trainings provided by the City of Seattle. SPD also has developed a series of trainings on de-escalation, crisis intervention, and most recently bystander intervention training.

Officer Uniform and Equipment

The proliferation of the external carrier vest does sometimes bring with it an appearance similar to some members of the military. These vests have become popular because they are much more efficient at distributing the weight – and availability – of the increasing number of tools officers are expected to have available to them in the field. It is not realistic at this time to require officers to return all of this equipment to their duty belts, both due to physical health issues known to result from this practice, as well as a lack of space on the belt.

The department is considering issuing more guidance about what can be on the carrier vest to address on some level the perception that some officers appear too tactical. SPD, unlike many departments, does allow for a baseball-style cap or culturally appropriate headwear instead of the more formal 8-point. Some SPD frontline specialty or civilian units (e.g., CSOs) do wear "softer" uniforms as they have different functions and tool needs, within the department.

Community Safety and Property

The department's policies and trainings, specifically around use of force, make it very clear that in line with the Constitution and law, force must be reasonable and proportional to ensure the life and safety of persons. A variety of policies require an officer to consider whether the actions would endanger anyone's life or safety before engaging in certain actions. While it is not explicitly stated in the manner in which the question is worded, it is clear throughout the policy compendium that SPD places the highest priority on protecting and ensuring the sanctity of human life.

The Seattle Police Department is committed to continuously scanning, reviewing, and evaluating emerging and new options in each of these areas of concern. SPD recognizes the utmost importance of the community viewing SPD officers as approachable and engaged public servants committed to community safety.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in blue ink, appearing to read 'A. Diaz', is positioned above the printed name.

Adrian Z. Diaz
Chief of Police
Seattle Police Department